

**2004 WSDOT AVIATION UPDATE  
BRIEFING PAPER**

Prepared for the  
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**PURPOSE:**

The purpose of this briefing paper is to provide a status report on the update of the Washington State Aviation System Plan and its subsequent integration into the Washington Transportation Plan (WTP) and regional transportation planning organization (RTPO) plans.

**BACKGROUND:**

The primary focus of the Aviation System Plan Update is to provide a viable, balanced and integrated system of airports in the State of Washington that address short term and long term air transportation needs that meet the state's interest.

***WASHINGTON AVIATION SYSTEM PLAN UPDATE***

WSDOT Aviation has initiated an update to the Washington Aviation System Plan (WASP) to implement recommendations of the Aviation Study Team and to reexamine the aviation system for consistency with the WTP and Aviation policies. The system plan update began in early 2004 and is scheduled for completion in 2005. During the update process components of the WASP will be shared and integrated with the WTP and RTPO plans.

Three primary objectives for the WASP update were identified:

- ▶ To identify and analyze the aviation assets and needs of the state to assure that aviation supports the transportation system, statewide economy and cross-state mobility of people and goods.
- ▶ To develop an airport functional classification system that would establish categories of airports based on their type and function within the aviation system.
- ▶ To provide continued guidance for the development of a system of airports that meets the state's existing and future air transportation needs.

**Early Development of the Aviation System Plan**

In 1970, the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) began funding the state airport system planning effort, which is now referred to as the Washington Aviation System Plan (WASP). Washington State's first plan was completed in 1973 and has been periodically updated in response to the needs of the state and the nation. The last major update of the system plan was in 1990.

Washington's system of airports provides a variety of services vital to the state, national and international economy and is an integral part of the overall transportation system. Scheduled air passenger service allows for rapid access to national and international destinations with more than 30 million passengers at

the state's scheduled commercial service airports. Primarily air service is not only provided by Seattle-Tacoma International Airport and Spokane International Airport, but also 10 other commercial service airports around the state. Air cargo service, which is the fastest growing mode of freight movement, is critical to many industries in Washington. General aviation airports support business, emergency medical and recreational flying at communities throughout the state and are important economic assets to communities. Growth in demand for aviation services, both passenger and air cargo, continue to outpace other transportation modes.

The primary authority for meeting the state's interest rests with the owners of Washington's airports. Of the 129 airports in the state system plan, 41 (31%) are owned by cities, 10 (10%) are owned by counties, 31 (24%) are owned by public port districts, 23 (19%) are owned privately, 16 (13%) are owned by the state, and 7 (3%) are owned jointly by cities and counties or between cities. Airports are largely under the authority of local governments that invest the resources to preserve the airport infrastructure, and keep these airports operational for air carriers and general aviation aircraft that use them.

### **Washington State Aviation Policy**

In 1996, the Transportation Commission called together a group of aviation stakeholders as the Aviation Policy Advisory Committee to identify aviation issues, and make recommendations to the commission on an appropriate, expanded state role in aviation. The primary charge of the advisory committee was to generate advisory recommendations regarding Commission Resolution 477 to the Transportation Commission. Commission Resolution 477 addressed developing an integrated statewide program to coordinate air and surface transportation. The Resolution also called upon WSDOT to implement a seven-part statewide air transportation and planning investment program that defined the state's interest. As a result, the Aviation Policy Advisory Committee recommended four broad areas to define the state interest in aviation:

Preservation:	It is the state's interest that aviation facilities and services be preserved that provide access for all regions of the state to the nation's air transportation system, provide for emergency management, and support local economies.
Safety:	It is the state's interest that transportation by air be safe.
Capacity:	It is the state's interest that there be sufficient airport capacity to respond to growth in demand to ensure access across the state, the nation and the world.
Environmental:	It is the state's interest that negative environmental impacts of airports on people and the natural environment be mitigated.

### **Aviation System Plan Study Team**

In 2003, WSDOT Aviation undertook a program to examine state aviation interests through the formation of several study teams. The Aviation System Plan Study Team is one of three study teams (System Plan, Education, and Search and Rescue) that examined statewide aviation interests and provided recommendations on the formation of the strategic business plan, advanced long-range aviation system planning, and work programs necessary for implementation. The Aviation System Plan Study Team made the following recommendations:

- ▶ Airports of Statewide Significance. That certain transportation issues and airport facilities cross local and regional boundaries and are vital to the statewide economy and the cross-state mobility of people and goods.
- ▶ Intermodal Connections. WSDOT Aviation is a component of the Washington Transportation Plan, which covers all modes of Washington's transportation system and is required by state and federal law to be regularly updated through a continuous aviation system planning process.

- Public Benefit. Classify airports according to class to increase consistency between FAA, State of Washington, and local aviation policies, rules, and regulations to maximize the value and benefits of public investment by recognizing that different types of airports have different regulatory and policy needs.
- Changing Technologies and Demographics. Assist regional transportation organizations, local jurisdictions and airport sponsors to cooperatively integrate important aviation/airport system plan data, capital development needs and emerging aviation system trends and issues into local, region and statewide plans.

### **Aviation System Plan Update Underway**

Beginning in the summer of 2004, WSDOT Aviation formed an Aviation Work Group to help develop a classification system and threshold criteria to measure the type and function of public use airports within the state. The Aviation Work Group was comprised of a cross section of volunteer members with a broad base of knowledge on aviation, airport facilities and transportation systems. Representatives included the FAA, airport owners and managers, aviation interest groups, regional transportation organizations and state agencies including roads, economic development, and community development. The work group held two meetings in July and September of 2004.

The Work Group identified five classifications for airports. They included the following:

- Commercial Service Airports. Airports providing scheduled passenger service.
- Regional Airports. High activity airports capable of accommodating all types of aircraft including business jets. These airports are also capable of accommodating aircraft in inclement weather.
- Local Community Airports. Serve medium to small communities and local business activities and capable of accommodating single and multi-engine general aviation aircraft.
- Recreation or Remote Airports. Serve recreation areas and communities, recreation destinations and remote backcountry airports, which may also be strategically located for emergency, medical and firefighting access in mountainous or other remote areas.
- Seaplane Bases. These facilities are approved designated water land areas.

The Work Group also developed a series of threshold criteria using demand factors that were recognized by the US Department of Transportation to determine contributions to the varying needs of air transportation and economic needs of the state. Demand factors included both aviation and non-aviation related issues. These factors included access, airport facilities, airport services, airport preservation and expansion capabilities, and economic development capabilities. Under each of the demand factors a series of threshold criteria were identified and weighted to measure the type and function of airports. Weighting of the threshold criteria also provided a mechanism for placement of airports within the functional classification scheme.

Threshold criteria under each of the demand factors were generally identified and included the following:

- Access. Population within a twenty-mile radius of an airport, number of based aircraft, passenger service, number of airport operations, number of registered pilots and surface access.
- Airport Facility. Airport runway length and width, taxiways, approach capabilities, runway surface type, aprons, hangers, capable of meeting safety standards, lighting systems, navigation aids, and weather systems.
- Airport Services. Aircraft repair, fuel GA/AV, air charter service, ground transportation, and food service.

- ▶ Expansion and Preservation. Able to provide safe operations and expand to accommodate future demand or capacity issues. Also includes local financial support, environmental factors, land use compatibility, compatible airport zoning and height obstructions.
- ▶ Economic Opportunities. Property and infrastructure expansion, supports aviation, industrial and commercial development, employment, air cargo service, serves tourism, cultural and recreation resources, and foreign trade.

### **Next Steps in the Aviation System Plan Update**

Next steps in the system plan update include using the threshold criteria identified under each of the demand factors to measure and place airports within the classification system. The analysis will be conducted utilizing an aviation transportation-modeling program with geographical information system resources.

Once the airports have been identified and classified, the Aviation Advisory Committee will assist WSDOT Aviation staff with developing performance objectives that meet the WTP and Aviation System Plan goals for each of the classifications. Performance objectives may include minimum or desirable airport facilities, airport services, access, and expansion capabilities. Performance objectives will then be analyzed to determine the system capabilities, gaps, and system wide deficiencies under each of the airport categories and by individual airport. Gaps and deficiencies will be reviewed to determine system development costs. Funding objectives will be identified should revenues fall short of anticipated improvement needs.

Funding objectives may include one or more of the following:

- ▶ Re-evaluate aviation system plan objectives.
- ▶ Increase local match requirements for state aviation grants.
- ▶ Target specific development that will sustain the aviation system.
- ▶ Downsize the overall number of eligible airports within the system plan.
- ▶ Propose increased pilot and aircraft registration fees or increased aviation fuel tax through a legislative revenue package in 2007-2009.

During the update process, information on the airport system and airports within the system will be forwarded to state, regional and local jurisdictions, airport owners and aviation interests for public review and comment. The first series of meetings on the proposed airport classification and classification objectives will be this month.

### **RECOMMENDATION:**

None required.

For more information, contact John Sibold, Aviation Director at 360-651-6300.